

## **7 VISUAL RESOURCES**

This chapter describes the existing visual characteristics of the project area and evaluates the visual impacts of the project. The visual impact analysis considers existing scenic resources and the potential visibility of the project area from surrounding areas, including both the physical characteristics of biomass facility and changes in light and glare in the project area. The descriptions of the existing visual setting are accompanied by photographs of representative views, taken during site visits on April 6, 2012. An overview of the photograph locations (Key Observation Points) is provided in Exhibit 7-1.

### **7.1 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING**

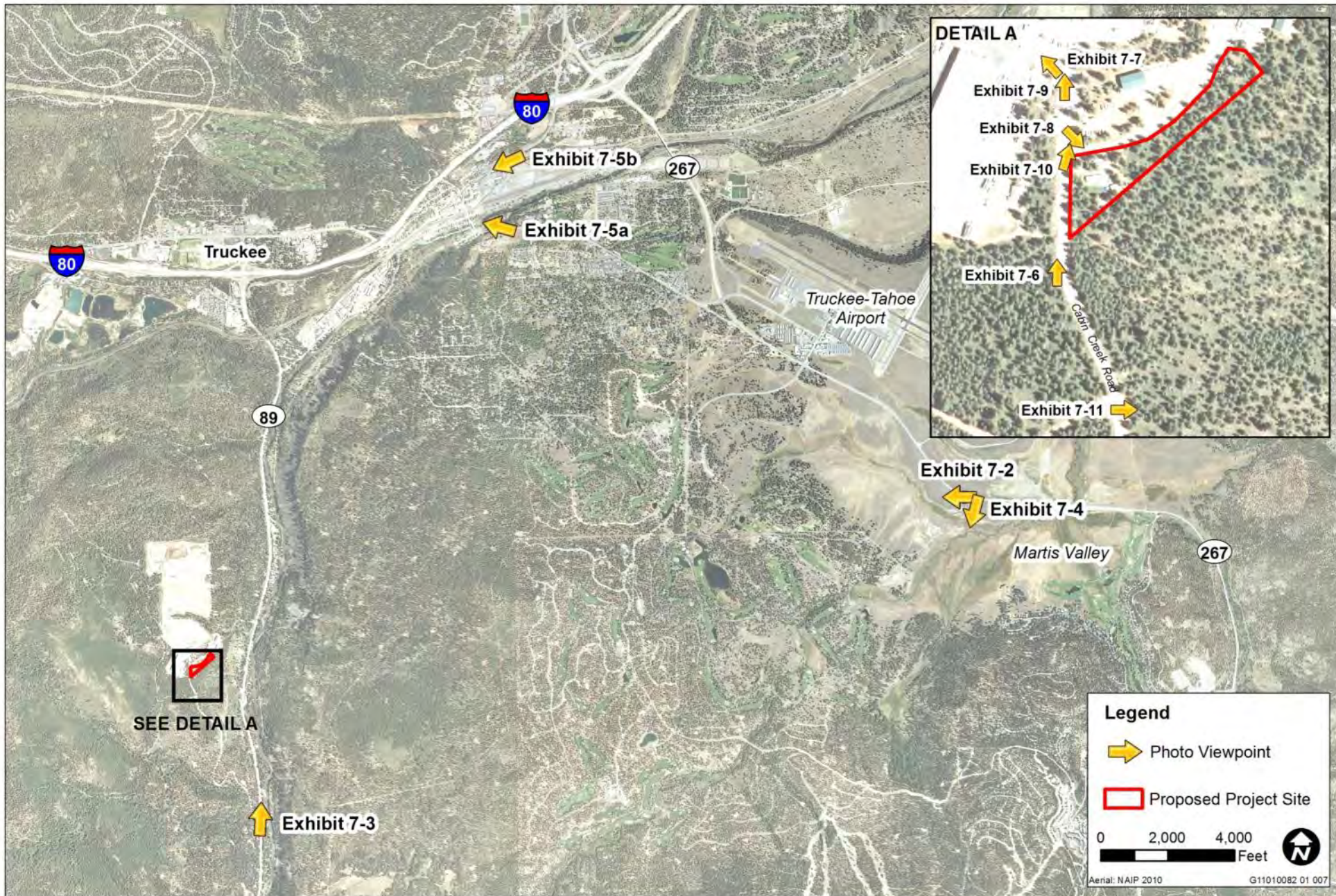
#### **7.1.1 REGIONAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER**

The region in which the project site is located generally includes the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada Mountains in Placer and Nevada Counties north of the Lake Tahoe Basin and south of Sierra Valley. This region is sparsely populated, and the landscape character is defined by the dominant natural features made up of striking geologic formations, varied terrain, lakes, streams, and diverse natural vegetation communities. The terrain is generally defined by gently sloping to moderately steep plateaus and mountain valleys (Martis Valley, Sierra Valley) with some steep mountainous areas (Exhibit 7-2). The plateaus, valleys, and mountains are dissected by streams in moderately steep-sided canyons, including the Truckee River Canyon (Exhibit 7-3,). Elevation ranges from about 5,000 feet above mean sea level (msl) along the Truckee River up to over 9,000 feet above msl on Mount Lola, located 12 miles northwest of Truckee. The crest of the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range rises to the west of the Truckee River canyon with numerous peaks between 8,000 feet and 9,000 feet above msl, including Mt. Lincoln, Mount Andersen, and Tinker Knob. Natural water features in the region include Donner Lake, located at the foot of Donner Pass and the Lower Truckee River, which drains from Lake Tahoe, flows north parallel to State Route 89, then turns east at Truckee to flow toward Reno Nevada.

Vegetation is characterized by plant communities dominated by Jeffrey pine, ponderosa pine, mixed conifer associations, and sagebrush at lower elevations, and white fir and red fir at higher elevations. Mountain meadows are interspersed within the forested areas, black cottonwoods are common in streamside areas, and aspen groves are scattered among the forests and woodlands. Dominant man-made features in the region include regional and interregional transportation corridors (Union Pacific Railroad, I-80, and Donner Pass Road, which cross Donner Pass, SR 89, and SR 267), local roadways, the Town of Truckee, ski resorts (Northstar) and the Northstar-at-Tahoe resort community (Exhibit 7-4, Exhibit 5a, and Exhibit 5b).

The region possesses many scenic vistas that can be viewed along the region's highways, from Amtrak on the Union Pacific Rail Line, hiking trails, and from parks and recreational areas. Major recreational areas that offer opportunities to view the visual resources within the region include Donner Lake, Donner Memorial State Park, located on the southeast shore of Donner Lake, the Pacific Crest Trail, the Martis Valley Wildlife Area, and many connecting trails.





Source: Data provided by TRPA in 2011; adapted by Ascent Environmental, Inc. in 2011

Exhibit 7-1

Representative Photo Locations







Exhibit 7-2

Martis Valley View of Sierra Nevada Mountains



Exhibit 7-3

Truckee River Canyon near Cabin Creek Road

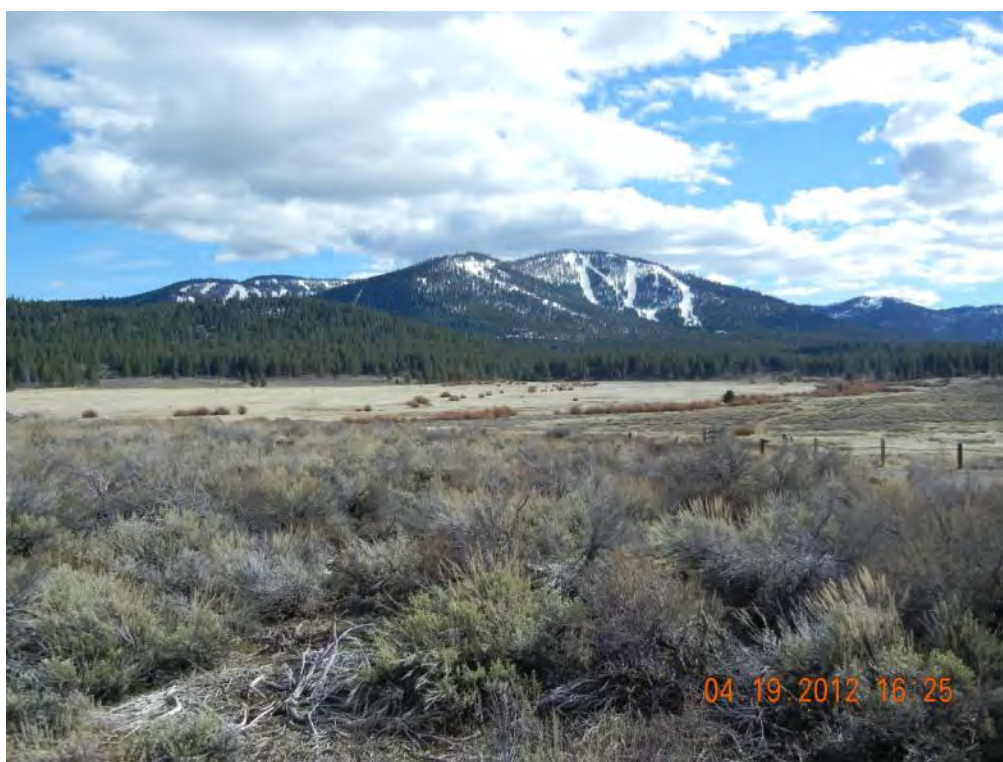


Exhibit 7-4

View of Northstar from Martis Valley



Exhibit 7-5a

View of Truckee from SR 267





Exhibit 7-5b

View of Truckee from Glenshire Drive

## 7.1.2 LOCAL STUDY AREA LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The landscape character in the area surrounding the existing Eastern Regional MRF and Transfer Station and the project site is dominated by mountainous terrain vegetated with Jeffrey pine forest (Exhibit 7-6 and Exhibit 7-7). The project site and Eastern Regional MRF and Transfer Station are situated on a sloping bench at an elevation of approximately 6,300 feet above msl. A ridge rises to over 7,000 feet above msl to the west of the site and the terrain drops off to the east down to the Truckee River Canyon. SR 89, located approximately 0.25 mile to the east of the site at approximately 5,910 feet elevation parallels the Truckee River. The Jeffrey pine forest surrounding the Eastern Regional MRF and Transfer Station and present on the project site has an open canopy with understory cover of huckleberry oak, mahala mat, manzanita, tobacco brush, and other shrub species. There is a single residence on the project site with the remainder of the site being forested (Exhibit 7-8). The landscape character in the vicinity of the project site is dominated by the existing buildings, equipment and pavement areas associated with the Eastern Regional MRF and Transfer Station, and TART/DPW facilities (Exhibit 7-9 and Exhibit 7-10), and the closed landfill area, which is barren of any vegetative cover.

## 7.1.3 LIGHT AND GLARE

Light pollution refers to all forms of unwanted light in the night sky around and above us, including glare, light trespass, sky glow and over-lighting. Views of the night sky are an important part of the natural environment, particularly for the mountain communities in the Truckee Basin. Excessive light and glare can also be visually disruptive to humans and nocturnal animal species.

The Truckee area is subject to light pollution from development within the Town of Truckee and from sky glow associated development occurring elsewhere in the Truckee Basin, and with the expansion of development in the Reno/Sparks metropolitan area (Town of Truckee 2006:4.1-18).



**Exhibit 7-6** View to the north of Eastern Regional MRF from Cabin Creek Road with the project site on the right



**Exhibit 7-7** Forested ridge west of Eastern Regional MRF Facility





Exhibit 7-8

View to the south from parking lot of existing residence on the project site on the right



Exhibit 7-9

View of entrance to Eastern Regional MRF to the north of the project site



Exhibit 7-10

View to northeast of parking lot north of the project site



Exhibit 7-11

View to the east from Cabin Creek Road  
across Truckee River Canyon



The Eastern Regional MRF and Transfer Station and TART facilities have nighttime security lighting. Some nighttime operations (from 4 a.m. to 7 a.m.), such as equipment maintenance, also occurs at the Eastern Regional MRF and Transfer Station, requiring additional lighting (Placer County 2010).

### 7.1.4 EXISTING VISUAL QUALITY

Existing visual quality of the project site is considered moderately low. The project site has one residence and is forested with a Jeffrey pine forest with an open canopy. The forested portions of the site are visually similar to the adjacent forest. There are no unique trees or rock outcroppings that add visual interest to the site. The adjacent paved areas (Cabin Creek Road, parking area and access road), fencing, equipment storage and industrial buildings of the Eastern Regional MRF and Transfer station, and TART/DPW facilities detract from the visual environment of the site and surrounding area.

### 7.1.5 SUMMARY OF VIEWING CONDITIONS

Views of the surrounding landscape from Cabin Creek Road are limited by the forest (Exhibit 7-11). The project site is not visible from State Route 89 because of the elevation difference between the site and the Truckee River Canyon, which is approximately 400 feet lower than the project site. The site is visible from Cabin Creek Road as it approaches the Eastern Regional MRF and Transfer Station site from the south; however, the site is largely screened by pine trees when viewed from a distance. (See Exhibit 7-6).

### 7.1.6 KEY OBSERVATION POINTS

Public views of the project site are mainly restricted to the views from Cabin Creek Road and adjacent areas within the Eastern Regional MRF and Transfer Station. The Eastern Regional MRF building and maintenance and administration building block views of the project site from the west. The views of the project site from south on Cabin Creek Road, as shown in Exhibit 7-6 are partially screened by trees. The project site is screened from views from U.S. Forest Service Road #06 located to the east of the Truckee River by terrain and vegetation.

### 7.1.7 VIEWER SENSITIVITY

An important element in assessing a project's visual impacts is defining the potential viewers of the landscape and their sensitivity to landscape change. Viewer sensitivity is gauged based on the visibility of resources in the landscape, the proximity of viewers to the visual resource, the elevation of viewers relative to the visual resource, the frequency and duration of views, the number of viewers, and the type and expectations of individuals and viewer groups.

### VIEWER POSITION

The criteria for identifying the importance of views are related in part to the position of the viewer relative to the resource or viewshed. A viewshed is defined as an area of the landscape that is visible from a particular location (e.g., an overlook) or series of locations (e.g., a road or trail). To identify the importance of views, a viewshed may be divided into distance zones. Distance zones in viewsheds would vary between different geographic regions or types of terrain. Commonly used criteria for distance zones are as follows:

- ▲ The foreground zone is up to one-half mile from the viewer.
- ▲ The middleground zone extends up to 4 miles from the foreground.
- ▲ The background zone extends 4 miles from the viewer to the horizon.

In this case, the visibility of the site is limited due to vegetation, terrain, and the site's isolated location. Views of the project site are restricted to foreground views. However, the foreground zone in this case is to a distance much closer than one-half mile because of the screening provided by the surrounding Jeffrey pine forest. The project site is not visible from any adjacent roadways other than Cabin Creek Road which provides access to the Eastern Regional MRF and Transfer Station.

## **VIEWER TYPE, VIEW FREQUENCY, AND VIEW DURATION**

Viewer sensitivity also depends on type of viewers and the frequency and duration of views. Generally, visual sensitivity increases with an increase in the frequency of viewing (e.g., daily, seasonally) and the duration of views (i.e., how long a scene is viewed). Also, visual sensitivity is higher for views seen by people who are driving for pleasure, especially on scenic highways and stopping at scenic overlooks; for people engaged in recreational activities such as hiking, biking, skiing, bird watching, or camping, especially on dedicated recreational trails and areas; and for views seen by residents in the vicinity of their homes. Sensitivity tends to be lower for commuters or people driving as part of work or otherwise engaged in work related activities. Sensitivity is also lower for views of commercial and industrial landscapes. (Federal Highway Administration 1988:63-64, U.S. Forest Service 1995: 4-2 to 4-6).

The project site is adjacent to the Eastern Regional MRF and Transfer Station and is not within or adjacent to any areas dedicated to recreational use. The unpaved roads on adjacent USFS land to the west of the Eastern Regional MRF and Transfer Station and the closed landfill may be used for informal recreation; however, the area does not have any dedicated trails or campgrounds. USFS road and trails used for recreation (Forest Road 06 or Sawtooth Road) are located approximately 0.8 mile to the east, across the Truckee River canyon. The site is screened from views along this road by trees and terrain. Viewers of the site are employees of the Eastern Regional MRF and Transfer Station, TART facility, members of the public transporting materials for recycling or disposal, and commercial haulers bringing loads to the facility.

## **VIEWER ACCESS**

The accessibility that viewers have to a landscape view or vista is another factor in assessing aesthetic impacts. The primary determinant of viewer access is the number of people that can view the resource or site. Other than the employees living in temporary caretaker residences (one on the project site), no residents are in the immediate area of the project site, and the project site is not visible to any residential areas. As described above, other viewers of the site include employees of the Eastern Regional MRF and Transfer Station, TART facility, members of the public transporting materials for recycling or disposal, and commercial haulers bringing loads to the facility.

## **VIEWER SENSITIVITY**

Taking into consideration the factors of viewer position, viewer type, view frequency, view duration, and viewer access, viewer sensitivity for the project site and vicinity is considered low. Views of the project site are limited due to terrain and the project's isolation and the surrounding Jeffrey pine forest that screens the site. While many viewers of the site would have frequent and long duration views of the site, these viewers are engaged in work related activities. The site is not near any dedicated recreational facilities nor does it possess any visual attributes unique to the area that would elicit a high degree of viewer concern. Therefore, viewer sensitivity to visual changes on the site is considered low.



## 7.2 REGULATORY SETTING

### 7.2.1 FEDERAL

There are no federal programs or policies addressing visual resources that pertain to the project site.

### 7.2.2 STATE

#### CALIFORNIA SCENIC HIGHWAY PROGRAM

California's Scenic Highway Program was created by the California Legislature in 1963 and is managed by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). The goal of this program is to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from changes that would affect the aesthetic value of the land adjacent to highways. A highway may be designated "scenic" depending on how much of the natural landscape travelers can see, the scenic quality of the landscape, and the extent to which development intrudes on travelers' enjoyment of the view (Caltrans 2011).

The Program includes a list of highways eligible to become, or designated as, official scenic highways; and includes a process for the designation of official State or County Scenic Highways. State Route 89, which runs parallel to the Truckee River east of the project site, is an "Eligible" route under the Scenic Highway Program (Caltrans 2011).

### 7.2.3 LOCAL

#### PLACER COUNTY GENERAL PLAN

The relevant policies of the General Plan with respect to visual resources are listed below. Refer to Table 4-1 in Chapter 4, Land Use for analysis of the project's consistency with applicable General Plan policies.

- ▲ **Policy 1.K.3.** The County shall require that new development in rural areas incorporates landscaping that provides a transition between the vegetation in developed areas and adjacent open space or undeveloped areas.
- ▲ **Policy 1.K.4.** The County shall require that new development incorporates sound soil conservation practices and minimizes land alterations. Land alterations should comply with the following guidelines:
  - a. Limit cuts and fills;
  - b. Limit grading to the smallest practical area of land;
  - c. Limit land exposure to the shortest practical amount of time;
  - d. Replant graded areas to ensure establishment of plant cover before the next rainy season; and
  - e. Create grading contours that blend with the natural contours on site or with contours on property immediately adjacent to the area of development.
- ▲ **Policy 1.K.5.** The County shall require that new roads, parking, and utilities be designed to minimize visual impacts. Unless limited by geological or engineering constraints, utilities should be installed underground and roadways and parking areas should be designed to fit the natural terrain.

## 7.3 IMPACTS

### 7.3.1 SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

Pursuant to Placer County's Environmental Questionnaire, and CEQA Guidelines Appendix G, an adverse effect on visual resources impact is considered significant if implementation of the project would do any of the following:

- ▲ have a substantial, demonstrable negative aesthetic effect.
- ▲ substantially damage scenic resources, including but not limited to trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway;
- ▲ substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings; or
- ▲ create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

### 7.3.2 METHODS AND ASSUMPTIONS

This visual impact analysis is based on field observations in April of 2012, a review of site plans review of aerial photographs, photographs of the project site, and simulations of the completed biomass facility (see Chapter 3, Project Description). Analysis of the project's visual impacts is based on evaluation of the changes to the existing visual resources that would result from project implementation. In determining the extent and implications of the visual changes, consideration was given to:

- ▲ Existing visual qualities of the affected environment and specific changes in the visual character and qualities of the affected environment;
- ▲ the visual context of the affected environment;
- ▲ the extent to which the affected environment contains places or features that provide unique visual experiences or that have been designated in plans and policies for protection or special consideration; and
- ▲ the sensitivity of viewers, access of viewers, their activities, and the extent to which these activities are related to the aesthetic qualities affected by the project-related changes.

### 7.3.3 ISSUES OR POTENTIAL IMPACTS NOT DISCUSSED FURTHER

All issues related to visual resources listed above are addressed in the analysis below.

### 7.3.4 IMPACT ANALYSIS

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<b>Impact 7-1</b>	<b>Visual Character Impacts.</b> While removal of onsite trees and construction of industrial structures could be perceived to have an adverse effect on the appearance of the project site in relation to other more pristine and natural areas, construction and operational activities at the site would not result in physical characteristics that are substantially different from the developed conditions at the adjacent Eastern Regional MRF and Transfer Station and TART facilities. Therefore, the project would not substantially degrade the visual quality of the site. This impact would be <b>less than significant</b> .
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The appearance of the project site would be altered by the removal of vegetation and placement of the industrial structures on the site. The vegetation on the adjacent USFS managed land would not be affected by the proposed project. (Exhibits 7-12 to 7-14 show a simulation of the placement of the structures on the site).



However, the appearance of the project site, with limited vegetation, a two-story metal-sided building, paved surfaces, various types of vehicles and equipment, and woody biomass piles would not be substantially different than the visual conditions of the adjacent Eastern Regional MRF and Transfer Station and TART facility. These adjacent facilities are largely cleared of vegetation, with buildings of metal-sided construction, chain link fencing, and areas used for equipment and vehicle storage.

The project site is not within or adjacent to any areas dedicated to recreational use or in an area that has unique scenic qualities. Persons viewing the site would be employees of the Cabin Creek Biomass Facility, Eastern Regional MRF and Transfer Station, TART facility, members of the public transporting materials for recycling or disposal, and commercial haulers bringing loads to the facility. Therefore, those viewing the site would not be highly sensitive to visual change and visual conditions on the project site. For these reasons, the project would not substantially degrade the visual quality of the site and the project’s impact on visual resources of the project site and its surroundings would be **less than significant**.

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<b>Impact 7-2</b>	<b>Scenic Resource Impacts.</b> The project site does not possess any unique scenic resources for the area, including, rock outcroppings, trees, or historic buildings. State Route 89 is an Eligible route under the State Scenic Highway Program; however project buildings would not be visible from State Route 89 and would have no effect on views experienced by travelers on that route. This impact would be <b>less than significant</b> .
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The project site does not possess any unique scenic resources for the area, including, rock outcroppings or historic buildings. While the site would be cleared of most trees, the trees on the site are in dispersed patches, are not unique to the area, and have the same appearance as the trees in the surrounding landscape. Further, the project would continue the developed setting of the Eastern Regional MRF and Transfer Station and TART facilities, but would not extend the developed footprint of the site into pristine and heavily forested areas. State Route 89 is an Eligible route under the State Scenic Highway Program; however, the project site is not visible from State 89 and would have no effect on views experienced by travelers on that route. Therefore, this impact would be **less than significant**.

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<b>Impact 7-3</b>	<b>Light and Glare Impacts.</b> The existing Eastern Regional MRF and Transfer Station and TART facilities currently use night lighting for operations and security purposes. Because of the 24-hour operations at the proposed biomass facility, additional nighttime lighting would be required and would be installed on the perimeter of the proposed building and mounted under the roof of the pole-barn structure. While the project site is located in a remote area, and nighttime lighting would not affect significant numbers of people, the additional lighting would potentially increase sky glow effects that could adversely affect nighttime views of the sky outside of the immediate project area. This would be considered a <b>potentially significant</b> impact.
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Because of the 24-hour operations at the proposed biomass facility, exterior lighting would be required for the main building, which would be up to 50 feet tall, parking, and other vehicle access areas, and the fuel yard area. Security lighting would be wall-mounted along the perimeter of the biomass building and would be mounted under the roof of the pole-barn structure. The project site is located in a remote area, and nighttime lighting would not affect significant numbers of people in the immediate area. Two employee residences would be located adjacent to the project site. One of the residences would receive substantial shielding from the Eastern Regional MRF building. While the site and adjacent areas currently support nighttime lighting sources, the project would increase the number and distribution of these sources. Depending on their design, intensity, and location, the additional lighting associated with the project could potentially increase sky glow effects that would be noticeable from some distance. This impact would be considered **potentially significant**.



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Source: Wood Rodgers 2012

Exhibit 7-12

Viewpoint 1 Simulation







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Source: Wood Rodgers 2012

Exhibit 7-13

Viewpoint 2 Simulation







Source: Wood Rodgers 2012

Exhibit 7-14

Viewpoint 3 Simulation



## 7.4 MITIGATION MEASURES

*No mitigation measures are necessary for Impacts 7-1 and 7-2 because no significant impacts were identified.*

### Mitigation Measure 7-3

*The Applicant shall ensure that exterior lighting installed at the facility will conform to an approved lighting plan. The exterior lighting plan shall be prepared prior to the issuance of a building permit, and submitted to the County with project Improvement Plans for approval. Exterior lighting shall be limited to lighting required for safe operations and security purposes. The exterior lighting plan shall require at a minimum the following:*

- › Identification of location of lighting, height, and positioning of all light fixtures, and type and style of light fixtures;*
- › Lighting shall be directed downward using fully shielded fixtures or fixtures otherwise designed to prevent light trespass or projection of light above the horizontal, except as needed for safe operations and security;*
- › The height of light poles shall be limited to 20 feet except as needed for operational and safety purposes. Light fixtures are not to exceed the height of adjacent structures.*
- › Ground level illumination levels shall not exceed two foot candles at the project property line.*

### Level of Significance After Mitigation

Implementation of the mitigation measure would reduce the project's lighting impacts to a less-than-significant level because a lighting plan and installation of fully shielded lighting fixtures would be required and the project could not exceed two foot candles of illumination at ground level at the property line.



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